



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

## **MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT**

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, March 21– March 27, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2008 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

FWP announces the completion and availability of the Montana Gray Wolf Conservation and Management 2008 Annual Report. FWP's report, which is available online at [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov), shows Montana's wolf population increased about 18 percent in 2008, compared to a 34 percent increase in 2007. The minimum Montana wolf population is estimated at 497 wolves, in 84 verified packs, and 34 breeding pairs. FWP's report is part of the annual federal recovery update required by USFWS. The end of 2008 count also estimates that 302 wolves inhabited Wyoming and 846 wolves inhabited Idaho. Annual reports from Idaho, Wyoming, and information about wolves in Yellowstone National Park and the northern Rockies as a whole are available online at: <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

During a wolf monitoring flight on 3/26, MFWP found a missing collared wolf from Idaho, wolf B279M, with the Mineral Mountain pack northwest of St Regis. It looks like B279M was originally captured in the Timberline pack northeast of Boise and has been missing from that pack since September of 2006.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

Flights: Bradley flew in western MT on 3/19 and 3/20. Weather prevented a flight in the Lower Clark Fork. Asher flew in southwestern MT on 3/21.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

On 3/22, WS killed two wolves from the Mitchell Mountain pack north of Helena. Lethal control had been authorized on 3/12. The livestock owner also moved the goats to a different pasture.

On 3/22, WS confirmed that a calf was killed by a wolf on private land south of Grant. This is the same ranch where a calf was confirmed killed and one calf was a probable kill on 3/17 as previously reported. WS efforts to collar a wolf and to kill a wolf are ongoing.

On 3/23, WS confirmed a wolf killed a calf on private property south of Big Timber in the east Boulder River drainage. The nearest pack is Baker Mountain who had been heard in a nearby drainage. FWP authorized 1 wolf to be killed and a SOS permit was issued to the landowner valid on his private property.

On 3/24, WS confirmed a newborn calf was killed by wolves on private land southwest of Philipsburg. A second calf was confirmed killed on 3/27. A group of 3 wolves have been in the area and are believed responsible. This is the same area where the Skalkao pack was removed in the fall of 2008 for killing livestock and where prior depredations by the Sapphire pack occurred. The 3 wolves are likely remnants of these packs and FWP authorized WS to remove all three.

On 3/26, WS confirmed a calf was killed by a wolf or wolves on private land southwest of Augusta. The incident occurred near where the Monitor Mountain pack had confirmed livestock kills, but the pack was not in the area at the time. A new pack called Benchmark formed in 2008 just north of this ranch, but no members are radio collared and its territory is known at this time. WS was authorized to collar / release a wolf. Trapping efforts will continue, weather permitting.

### **Outreach and Education Activities**

On 3/26, Laudon gave a presentation to two classes from Noxon School about wolves and their management. About 50 attended.

On 3/26 and 3/27, Laudon did three public talks about wolves and their management at Amber Bear Inn just outside of Kalispell. About 30, 42, and 44 people attended, respectively.

### **Research Activities**

A female wolf that dispersed from SW Montana last year, traveled through Wyoming, SE Idaho, NE Utah, N Colorado, and then back to south central Wyoming. She was recently located again in north central Colorado. Locations will be reported in the USFWS Weekly Report every 2 weeks and can be found on the USFWS website @ <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>

### **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

On 3/20, a collared wolf (SW336M) was found on mortality in the East Fork of the Bitterroot during a monitoring flight. Lance retrieved the wolf on March 21st. Cause of death was not apparent and the carcass will go to the lab for necropsy.

On 3/23, a dead adult wolf was picked up on I-90 several miles east of St. Regis. It appeared to have been hit by a car. It was likely a member of the Superior pack.

## **Other**

### **NEW -- Delisting Update:**

On March 6, 2009, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar affirmed the decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove gray wolves from the list of threatened and endangered species in the western Great Lakes and the Northern Rocky Mountain states of Idaho and Montana and parts of eastern Washington and Oregon and a small part of north central Utah. Wolves will remain a protected species under the Act in all of Wyoming because Wyoming state regulatory framework does not meet the adequate regulatory mechanism requirements of the ESA. The NRM & Western Great Lakes final delisting rules will be published in the next week or two and will become effective 30-days later. See the Department of Interior's press release and listen to a pod cast of the "pen and pad" press conference at: <http://www.fws.gov/>.

History / Background leading up to the 3-6-09 Announcement: On January 20<sup>th</sup>, as was somewhat expected, the new incoming administration put a "hold" on all new federal regulations that were not finalized and published in the Federal Register as of the 20<sup>th</sup>. The hold affects all federal agencies, all pending federal decisions, all subject areas. This was not a surprise as every new incoming administration for the last 20 years has done similar and put a "hold" on the previous administration's pending decisions. All new, incoming federal department / agency heads are directed to review rules not yet published and decide what should be done. Options are to approve them and move forward, modify them first and then publish them, or not publish them in order to take a different course of action.

Since the wolf delisting decision (rule) announced on January 14, 2008 was not yet published in the Federal Register, its publication will be delayed while it is being reviewed by new, incoming federal officials. The reviewers will examine the biological data and legal merits of the decision. It is not known how long the review process will take and when a decision will be made. Secretary of the Interior Salazar will make the decision. Additional information about delisting in the northern Rockies is available at the USFWS website: <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

### **Current Management in Montana until Delisting Takes Effect:**

FWP, through an interagency cooperative agreement, is still the lead agency for all wolf conservation and management (within the bounds of federal regulations) so long as adequate federal funding continues to be made available. FWP will continue to monitor wolves, do public outreach, and guide and direct research activities. No public hunting or trapping is allowed. USDA Wildlife Services is still the agency to investigate causes of injured or dead livestock and carry out FWP's decisions to address conflicts, as guided by federal regulations. Montana will continue to stay involved in litigation and any future delisting developments and will continue to seek the most efficient, successful path to delisting. FWP will also continue its collaborative work with Montana Tribes, other state and federal agencies, and the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program.

Check the wolf pages on the FWP website for important information and updates: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

### **Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:**

There are several openings on the Board that will be filled when Governor Schweitzer makes new appointments. The appointments are expected to be confirmed by the 2009 Montana Legislature.

The US Congress has passed the Omnibus Public Lands Bill that contained The Wolf Livestock Mitigation Act (Senate Bill 22). Next step is for the Omnibus Bill to be signed into law by the President.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: [www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf](http://www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf).

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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